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PLAY IN POETRY *By Louis Untermeyer*

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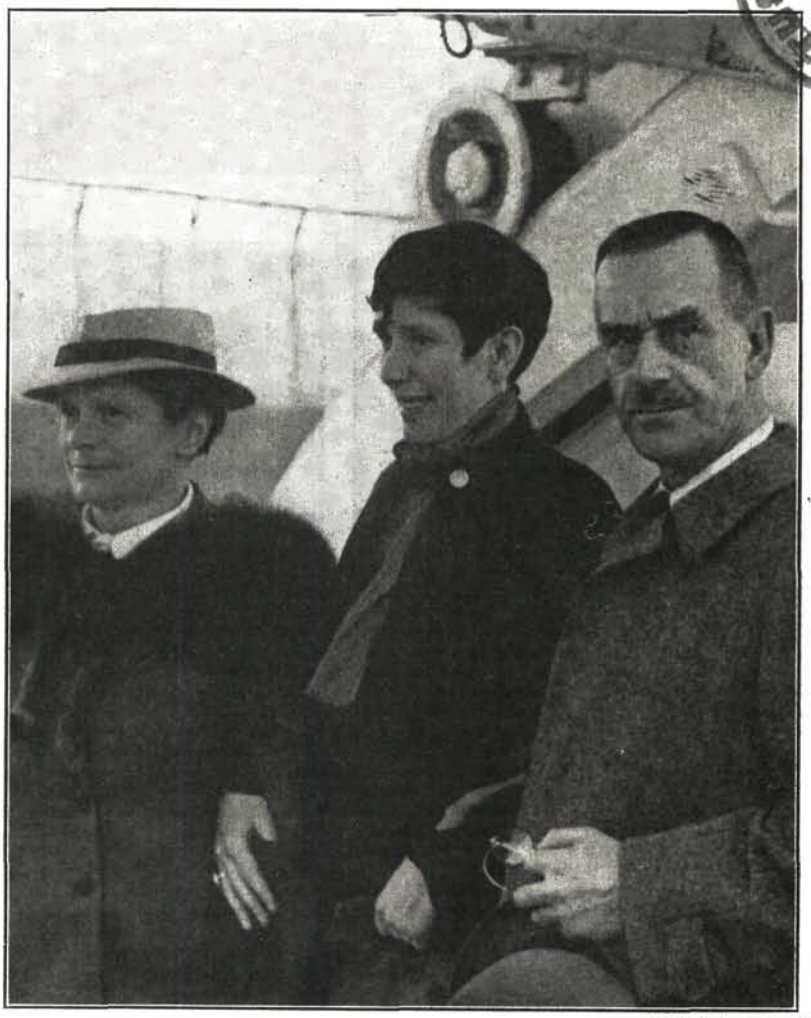

Alfred A. Knopf

THOMAS MANN
With his wife (left) and their daughter Erika (Mrs. W. H. Auden)

"In a few years many novelists, dramatists, and poets will be following the road he has opened into the shifts and continuity of time" . . . *(See page 5)*

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Play in Poetry*

BY LOUIS UNTERMEYER

LOUIS UNTERMEYER

THE average reader—who regards himself as a more than average critic—is the perfect dogmatist. Armed with impatience, predetermination, and six standard adjectives, he cuts his rapid way through the books of the dead and the literature of the living. He is particularly dogmatic about poetry, and that he seldom reads it makes his finalities all the more final. He has two conclusions about poetry, conclusions which are as complete as they are inconsistent. Poetry, he says, in the first place, is merely a tune without music, a melody without meaning, a set of soothing (and, sometimes, irritating) sounds without sense. And poetry, he inconsistently adds, is all too difficult because it is so full of hidden allusions, so intellectually condensed, so concentrated in meaning.

Actually poetry is neither an attempt to imitate music (except in such isolated cases as Sidney Lanier's) nor (except in the rhymed essays of Pope) an effort to rival the daily editorial in compact gravity and density. Poetry is often solemn, even sombre, but more frequently it expresses the side-spring of fancy, the leap of the adventurous imagination, the surprising fantasia of the subconscious. I think it can be maintained that, on the whole, poetry is as playful as it is profound.

By "playful" I do not mean merely the outburst of high spirits or the formal lightheartedness of light verse. I mean the essential spirit which unites and intensifies the figures of speech, the hyperboles and similes, all of which represent the poet's varying use of the invariable impulse to play. Poetry begins with metaphor, and the metaphorical power—the ability to see similarity in dissimilar things—is increased or decreased with the playfulness of the poet's mind. It is through metaphor that poetry achieves its rich suggestiveness, and becomes, as Robert Frost wrote half playfully, "the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another."

A metaphor is a game in which the wit of the writer and the wit of the reader are matched. The mind of the poet fastens on an object and then rushes halfway across the world to establish a relation between that object and some hitherto unrelated object. Although the objects are not in the least alike, the reader is quick to see the likeness at the point of comparison. My love, says the poet, is like—and, in the spirit of play, he looks about him for something resembling his lady as little as possible—like, he announces triumphantly, a red, red rose. To the solemn scientific eye there is no reasonable resemblance between the figure of a woman and the shape of a rose. But the reader is as little interested in laboratory realism as is the poet. It is an intellectual game, this saying one thing and meaning another, a verbal sportiveness; the poet points the way, and the reader's mind romps along.

No matter how long and deliberately the heart is studied, that variable organ would scarcely seem to be a thrush nesting in the willows, a tree bent down with apples, and a chambered nautilus rowing itself across the ocean—all at the same time. Yet the reader abandons deliberation; he forgets about the auricles and ventricles, the construction, the circulation, the position, even the function of that hollow, muscular organ. For the time being, at least, he is completely convinced when Christina Rossetti tells him:

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love has come to me.

Thus the metaphor is something more than an amusing literary device; it is a continual play of wit, an illuminating *double entendre*, a nimble magic in which writer and reader conspire to escape reality. Perhaps "escape" is the wrong word—the play of metaphor acts to enrich reality, even to heighten it. The average reader enjoys its intensification so much that he cannot help employing it. "My heart leaps," he says, knowing quite well that it contracts and expands quietly within the pericardium. Or, he declares still more mendaciously but earnestly, "my heart stood still." Even while he scorns poetry, the ordinary man helps himself to its properties and symbols; his daily life is unthinkable without metaphor. Having slept "like a log," he gets up in the morning "fresh as a daisy" or "fit as a fiddle"; he "wolfs down" breakfast, "hungry as a bear," with his wife, who has "a tongue like vinegar," but "a heart of gold." He gets into his car, which "eats up the miles," steps on the gas, and, as it "purrs"

* This article is condensed from two chapters of Louis Untermeyer's book, "Play in Poetry," to be published in March by Harcourt, Brace & Co. It contains a previously unpublished poem by Robert Frost, "Wilful Homing," which appears on page 18, near the end of the article.

Next Week

ACTION AT AQUILA
By HERVEY ALLEN
Reviewed by Jonathan Daniels

OUT OF AFRICA
By ISAK DINESEN
Reviewed by Hassoldt Davis

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along through the "hum" of traffic, he reaches his office where he is "as busy as a one-armed paper-hanger with the hives." Life, for the average man, is not "a bed of roses," his competitor is "sly as a fox" and his own clerks are "slow as molasses in January." But "the day's grind" is finally done and, though it is "raining cats and dogs," he arrives home "happy as a lark."

What the Babbitt says in casual conversation is not so far removed from what the poet has to say to him. It is only a step from universal banalities to metaphorical ingenuities, an easy transition from the average man's colorless stereotypes to the colorful images of the Elizabethans. "You are a queen," says the young man breathlessly in the 1937 parked car, "a honey," "a knockout," "a riot!" Unconscious of the playfulness, the novel brilliance, the extravagant humor, of his metaphors, the hard-boiled youth would snort if you told him he was speaking poetry. Yet Robert Herrick said it not so differently nor less metaphorically three centuries ago.

You are a tulip seen today,
But, dearest, of so short a stay
That where you grew scarce man can say.

You are a lovely July-flower,
Yet one rude wind or ruffling shower
Will force you hence, and in an hour.

. . . . . .

You are a full-spread, fair-set vine,
You can with tendrils love entwine,
Yet dried ere you distil your wine.

You are like balm enclosèd well
In amber or some crystal shell,
Yet lost ere you transfuse your smell.

. . . . . .

No reader can fail to recognize the play of fancy. "A tulip," "a July-flower," "a full-spread vine," "balm in a crystal shell" —the poet has gone somewhat far afield to compare his lady to these pastoral beauties. But it takes no less imaginative courage to draw metaphors from the prize-ring and the turbulent streets in order to speak of the beloved as "a knockout" and "a riot."

Metaphors are so vital a part of our speech, so common and used so unconsciously, that they become, as William Empson has indicated, the normal mode of development of a language. And it is the incalculable reach of the image—the establishment of a kinship between unrelated objects, the combination of exactness and ambiguity—which is its charm and power. Poetry may rest on the success or failure to establish that precarious point of relation. The poet balances himself on this point, just as he vacillates continually between pure music and pure meaning. Blake cries:

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

To the wholly rational mind this is a statement so illogical as to be absurd. The logical mind pictures a man overburdened with a bow of burning gold, arrows (of desire!), a spear, and a sword, all of which he is, somehow, to wield not in physical combat, but in a "mental fight." And these implements of war suddenly become architectural tools, for they are to be used to build Jerusalem on the soil of England—an undertaking which is as difficult as it is, politically speaking, undesirable. But we do not read such lines as we read the report of the British Commission on Palestine. We read them and are excited by them because of the blend of visual and sensual effects, of prophecy and muffled heroism, of shifting images and fixed purpose, of precise statement and vague allusion—in short, because of the shifting play of exactness and ambiguity which affects us like a spell. A spell, an enchantment, for it was with enchantment, or incantation, that poetry began. It was an incantation, or invocation, a play of words and deeds between man and the gods; now it is a play between man and men.

In Vachel Lindsay, for example, the play was outspoken. His was a motley America, an America which impartially acclaimed Daniel Boone and William Jennings Bryan, Johnny Appleseed and John L. Sullivan, Andrew Jackson and P. T. Barnum—acclaimed them not as individual, isolated phenomena, but as a galaxy of demi-gods. Lindsay saw these disunited States finally united by a congress or a congregation of pioneers and baseball players, Presidents and movie-queens; his "golden dream" was to be accomplished by a union of high idealism and the "higher vaudeville," by heroic endeavor and fantastic vision, by an earnest combination of beauty and ballyhoo. The humor was unashamed and explicit even when the purpose was most evangelistic; such poems as the "The Congo," "General William Booth Enters into Heaven," and "John Brown" are both grandiose and comic; "The Daniel Jazz" is a grotesque extravaganza, "The Kallyope Yell," that glorification of noise

—the Gutter Dream
Born of mobs, born of steam—

is as uproarious as a football cheer, and "The Santa Fé Trail" is frankly labelled "A Humoresque." The conscious exhorter and the not too conscious humorist collaborate in performances where the Gospel is preached through a saxaphone.

Booth led boldly with his big bass drum—
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
The saints smiled gravely and they said, "He's come."
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

The missionary and the minstrel are similarly combined in the rollicking opening of "The Congo," one of the wildest of contemporary fantasies, which the author gravely subtitled "A Study of the Negro Race":

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,
Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,
Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,

(*Continued on page* 14)

Snow Papyrus

BY CHRISTINE TURNER CURTIS

IN snowy midnights
When burghers clamp
The window haspings
And the globed lamp
Burns pollen-yellow
In a moon of frost—
Then like a shallop
Returned from tossed
Spume-whitened water
Over I cast
My spirit anchor—
Make mooring fast,
Reef in the lugsail,
Unstep the mast.

Here in harbor
In a quiet room,
With book and pillow
I watch the plume
Of winter writing
On the jet pane
Her frozen script
Of white grosgrain;
Now in drypoint
With acid bitten,
Crossed with clawings
Of a snow kitten—
Now broad hand-strokes
From a snow mitten.

The lamp burns golden:
The hours wax small,—
With howl like banshee
The northwinds hawl
Their seines of starfish
Through muffled skies,
And dreamily staring
With drowsy eyes
At hieroglyphics
Whiter than bone,
I ponder secrets
Which if known
Might outrival
Rosetta stone!

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The First Puritan

JOSEPH IN EGYPT. By Thomas Mann. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. 2 *vols.* $5.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

WHEN Thomas Mann's epoch-making story of Joseph and his Brethren unrolls to its last volume and the famous Bible story has been transmuted into terms significant for a new age, not a review, but a monograph, will have to be written upon the completed work.* All one can do now is to present an interim report, and an attempt at partial interpretation.

I have purposely used one of those cant reviewers' words so familiar in publisher's advertisements. I have called this great novel "epoch-making," not meaning, however, that it is great, though I think it is, or better than the last important novel reviewed, which is what that adjective usually means in current reviewing. My idea is, that it is too early yet to assess the ultimate value of this long novel. The long treatise on anthropology and religion which readers will remember in the first volume still out-balances the narrative in so far as it is written. The elaborate discussion of mythology in "Joseph in Egypt" will still trouble some readers who cannot get its full implications until the novel has gone further in its course. But already one can see that in its view of human nature and in its method of handling the human story this book is revolutionary, and is "epoch-making" in the same sense that, in our own times, Joyce's technique and Proust's reconstruction of the memory were epoch-making for the practice of fiction.

A PHARAOH. *From "The Nile," by Emil Ludwig (Viking).*

"Joseph in Egypt" picks up the Bible story where the Ishmaelites lift Joseph from the pit into which his brothers have cast him. As a historical novel it is of extraordinary richness, for quite apart from its penetrating psychology, the mere external pageant of the journey into Egypt and Joseph's sojourn there as a slave is vivid in its details, elaborate in its imaginative reconstruction of past civilizations, and as dramatic (since he came from the backwoods) as if some belated medieval had been led into modern America and the wonders of New York. Across the bustling littoral of the Mediterranean, over the desert to the fortress walls which keep the barbarians out of rich Egypt, the wise old Ishmaelite trader leads his caravan down into the Nile valley, heavy with cities, stiff with ritual, busy with an ancient, highly organized life. It is a travel movie of ancient civilization which the first volume of "Joseph in Egypt" gives us, on a scale which only a powerful imagination could create.

The latter part of the first volume and all of the second is story. Joseph, the consecrated egoist, a character in which the attributes of godhead are curiously blended with intellectual shrewdness, is at home in the house of Potiphar, and soon is master in all but name. I cannot go into the convincing reality of that palace household, the comic relief of the two dwarfs, one a good soul, one a bad, the drama of Joseph's success story in an Egyptian environment in which nothing is like the modern world except the fundamental instincts of man. Against this background the Bible story is retold in terms of what Mann thinks it must have meant in that Egypt where tradition had grown rigid, and where a brilliant youth, with a new idea of the moral nature of human duty and a new intuition of a God that could choose men to love him, brought a spark to set fire to the dry rushes of belief.

Potiphar is a wise and tolerant man-of-the-world, nursing the inferiority of his sexlessness, for he has been dedicated as a religious sacrifice to sterility. The beautiful sophisticate, Mut, his wife in name, is a simpler character. Her function in the story is to wreck herself, as so many after her were to be wrecked, upon the burning rocks of a self-centered religious idealism. Joseph, for all his shrewd worldliness, is the first Puritan. The novel, which has been descriptive, mounts into sheer narrative when Mut, that incomparable aristocrat, first becomes contemptuously aware of, then falls in love with, the alien Hebrew slave; then burns her soul into hate in a love story of a ruthless intensity that is no less human because its inner meaning is a conflict between two passions, one sensual which is coterminous with man, one spiritual which is the new thing in what is already an old world. The novel ends with the change of love to hate (as in the old story), the charge of rape, and Joseph's escape, thanks to the tolerant magnanimity of Potiphar, into a new servitude from which he is to rise again to become master of all Egypt. But that story is not yet told.

This most imperfect description of "Joseph in Egypt" is the way the book must read to the hasty reader. But it is only the surface of the story. Beneath and inter-penetrating is the profound and subtle reinterpretation of human motives which here, as in a less degree in his earlier books, is the dynamic quality of Mann's genius. For no one of these characters, and least of all Joseph, is an individual in himself alone. Each, and most of all Joseph, is a complex of ancestral tradition, an eddy in history, only understandable in terms of the stream. And this stream of tradition, of which the God-conscious strain of Abraham is a separable current, becomes conscious in the individual of the story, plays through him upon circumstances, is the more important part of his identity, and passes through him to mingle with other traditions and make the future.

The idea itself is not new, but until the two great half-sciences of anthropology and psychology had come to maturity, it was not possible for a creative imagination to study man in the time stream with more than a guessing knowledge of what caused his curious permutations and even stranger tenacities. Precisely as the sense of personality that came with the Renaissance freed Shakespeare for creation, so the new specific knowledge of the underworld of the human mind, and the new specific knowledge of the origin and nature and influence of mythology and the *mores*, have enabled Mann to work at fiction with new tools, and has made it possible for him to reconstruct a vital moment of the past with a truth to probable experience far more useful than even his archeological expertness. This I call epoch-making, for I believe that in a few years many novelists, dramatists, and poets will be following the road he has opened into the shifts and continuity of time. But all of these resources would have been of little value if he were not a great artist, as he is.

* An excellent criticism and summary of Mann's work so far will be found in "Thomas Mann's Joseph Story," by Harry Slochower. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. $1.)

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JOHN D. CRAIG: *with a pup hair seal.*

Tall Tales Ring True

DANGER IS MY BUSINESS. By John D. Craig. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1938. $3.

THIS is a proper wow of an adventure story. John Craig, at thirty-four, has done more than most men dream to endanger his life excitingly. He has fought sharks with bubbles, lured tigers with human meat, dodged twenty-five foot manta rays which wanted to scratch the lice from their heads against his diving tubes, lived with savage Riffs in Africa, and resisted the advances of octopi. He is a tall-tale-spinner, but his tales ring true, and he is the first to marvel at them. As a boy of twenty he made sufficient money in oil to carry him around the world. Returning to America he became a deep-sea diver and photographer for the motion picture companies. This was his ideal work, beneath the sea in the unexplored, fantastic land that is four-fifths of the earth's surface. There he saw Japanese divers raking and harvesting their submarine sargasso plantations, he tickled quarter-ton jewfish beneath the chin and found they liked it, he often saw the grey smoke of blood.

But these adventures have by no means sufficed him. Among the many authenticated sunken treasures of the sea he hopes now to recover at least a few millions in gold. He will dive to the *Merida* this spring, to the *Lusitania* in the summer, using his own original diving suit and breathing a mixture of oxygen and helium to permit quick ascension without risk of the "bends." His book, colloquially and jocularly written, is packed solid with danger and the lore of his trade.

A Columbus of Time

AN EXPERIMENT WITH TIME. By J. W. Dunne. Fourth edition, revised. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1938. $2.75.

Reviewed by J. B. PRIESTLEY

THIS is a new and revised edition of a book that has been out eleven years, but the most sensible thing to do here is to treat it as if it had just appeared for the first time. Why? Because to most American readers, the book has not appeared at all yet. They have never even heard of it, as I discovered for myself during a month's lecturing last year. If I had to name the most undeservedly neglected book in these States, it would be this of Dunne's. And perhaps I had better repeat here what I told so many thousands of listeners, that to my mind, of all the time theorists Dunne is at once the boldest, the most original, and the most convincing.

He calls his theory Serialism, because he believes that each of us is a series of Observers existing in a corresponding series of Times. In our ordinary daily life, we see the result of Observer One moving in Time One, though all the other Observers and Times are there. (It is a question of the focus of attention.) When we are asleep, our Observer One cannot function, and now Observer Two, who moves in Time Two, has a chance. Observer Two has a four-dimensional outlook, and so our stretch of Time One appears spatially to him. But being as yet inexperienced, Observer Two cannot focus his attention properly, and it flickers up and down the length of Time One. The queer result of these midnight four-dimensional antics is the dream, in which our ordinary waking self, our Observer One in Time One, may discover bits of both the Past and the Future. (That is, of course, Observer One's Past and Future, both of which are in Observer Two's Present.) And it is a fact, as he explains in this fascinating book, that Dunne was compelled to work out a new theory of time just because he discovered that in his dreams *he saw the future.* Now if this is a fact, then obviously our account of the universe must be so contrived that it will include this fact. You are not being scientific, even though some scientists seem to think so, if you ignore awkward facts.

Readers are at liberty to test the truth of this dream theory for themselves, though they must remember that it is not necessarily easy. (Dunne explains how to do it.) Whether his Serialism is true or false, I have no doubt whatever myself that in dreams we do actually catch glimpses of the future, and if I had space here I could give instances from my own and other persons' experiences. Furthermore, Dunne's theory seems to me the only one that explains the curious telescoping of time and space effects in dreams, also explains that odd feeling we have sometimes of having been in a place before, to say nothing of that ancient conviction, as old as man himself, that there is something prophetic about dreams.

Dunne himself, who makes no mystical claims and is in fact a mathematician and engineer (he was one of the earliest aeroplane designers), does not base his theory on the dream effect, though his first approach was in that direction, but arrives at it by independent reasoning, designed to prove the regressive nature of time. Like all original thinkers, who cannot be put into a convenient pigeon-hole, he suffers somewhat from our contemporary specialization, for the philosophers think he ought to be dealt with by the scientists, and the scientists feel he ought to be refuted by the philosophers. Meanwhile, as the reception of his second and more difficult book, "The Serial Universe," plainly showed, he will either have to be refuted or accepted very soon. *Nature,* our leading scientific periodical in England, admitted in its review of him that his charge that physics is making use of two different times, is unanswerable. It is Dunne's view—and I do not know enough about science to say whether he is right or not—that the dilemmas and hesitations and bewilderments of the modern physicist are due to the fact that the conception of a single universal Time no longer holds good. Here, obviously, is a thinker who cannot be ignored.

The ordinary reader, whether in search of comfort or intellectual adventure, will be fascinated by Dunne's attempt to give a reasonable account and explanation of immortality. Dunne declares that both time and self-consciousness are regressive. Now in a regress, the first term is different from all the succeeding terms, which proceed in majestic likeness to infinity. Our ordinary life here—the experience of Observer One in Time One—represents the first term of the regress. It differs from the succeeding terms because both Observer One and his Time One must come to an end; the grave awaits us as surely as the cradle greeted us; but Observer Two, whose fragmentary adventures we know in dreams, is moving in another time, along a dimension of things at right angles to that which represents ordinary time to us and that we may call the Fourth Dimension. Observer Two does not disappear into the grave, but moves forward in Time Two, which presumably after death would appear to him as Time One does now to our ordinary waking selves. The fantastic character of dreams is due to the fact that Observer Two has not learned to focus his attention, and that, in remembering dreams, we are trying to reduce a four-dimensional

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experience to three-dimensional terms. As immortal beings, we are "such stuff as dreams are made on."

One last point, to reply to the inevitable question about free will. Dunne holds, reasonably I think, that for Observer One his experiences along Time One are "determined," but that a higher Observer can intervene, within the limits of the fact that our various fields of action and attention are shared with our fellow beings. It has been obvious for a long time that the Free Will-Determinism argument had arrived at a stalemate because we did not really understand the nature of our lives. Dunne's contribution seems to me as reasonable as it is original. What he must not be asked for is a completely intelligible account of the whole vast and elaborate process. We might as well have asked Columbus for an ordinance survey of the whole New World.

Here then is a book that nobody with a grain of intellectual curiosity can afford to ignore. And do not be put off because the American publishers, in their unwisdom, have seen fit to give it a hideous format that looks like all the High School algebras I have ever seen.

J. B. Priestley's play, "Time and the Conways," recently on the New York stage and now published in book form, is based upon Dunne's theory of time.

Divided Family

ONE MINUS TWO. By Henri Troyat. New York: Ives Washburn. 1938. $2.

A GALLIC writer new to English and American readers is presented in this brief but telling study of family jealousy among the *cabotins.* In spite of poverty, the down-at-heel actor hero is happy because he possesses an adoring wife who assures him nightly that his performance in some trumpery farce has equalled Mounet-Sully at his best. But when the couple are precipitated into notoriety and comparative opulence as the parents of a child film star, the father finds himself resenting his son's early, untrained success. His wife's adoration is transferred to the child. As a result, though previously faithful, he feels impelled to run off on tour with a mistress, is miserable with her, and returns thankfully to Paris, only to discover that even with his son's precocious period of success already a thing of the past, the emotional balance cannot be restored. Father definitely hates son in the now divided family.

The narrative method in M. Troyat's book is straightforward and the treatment unaffected, tending towards a naturalistic appeal of the simpler sort. The characters are convincingly drawn, and there are many good details of life backstage and in the studios. With a little more irony this might have been a distinguished novel. As it is, however, the book is well planned and effective, if never of unusual subtlety or power.

Invitation to the Country

R. F. D. By Charles Allen Smart. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1938. $2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

OAK HILL is not Walden Pond and Charles Allen Smart is not Henry David Thoreau, but I wonder if this stout, humorous, and moving book is not as important to this America as what Thoreau wrote was to that of his time and his writing. Mr. Smart has done a splendid thing. Only obviously has he written the richly detailed record of the return to the land of the educated, literary, urban American. His is no mere country book. Far more important than that, he has given us the story of growth beyond books and schoolrooms to understanding, to satisfaction, to a wise and creative fatalism on the American earth.

That land, undoubtedly, provides the details for the relation by Charles Allen Smart of the education of Charles Allen Smart. But I wondered, as I got from his pages the smell of manure and hay and working men, whether that educational process was wholly a matter of the closeness of all life to planting and birth, growing and dying, labor and fruit. I suspected that this educational process was already in motion in him when he was engaged in the unappealing task of teaching rich men's sons to become bogus English gentleman, long before he went with his Peggy to the house in which his people had lived on the land from which they took their living. Certainly the humility and high spirits which he took back to Ross County, Ohio, are as essential to this story as any of the rural events within it. He was already equipped for his cash crop of writing; his learning lit experience without stiffening him before new and strange attitudes and tasks. Not animal obstetrics, nor the vagaries of weather or of hired men, nor any of the aspects of his country living seemed to me to be quite so important as the personality and the spirit which Charles Smart brought to them. I wondered even if, granted a Smart, such a development of the American might not also take place in the town, perhaps not in the great cities, sterilized by specialization, but in smaller American cities where life is still to be seen relatively whole.

Such seeing is the book's essence. Mr. Smart is a man who regards both the sky and the dirt and everything between and sees them free of preconception or dogmatism. That is a quality rare now, town or country; it is closer to the shrewd, unrestricted looking of older times than to the microscopic scrutiny of limited fields so common in our years and in our cities. We have learned to see so little well and much not at all. What Mr. Smart has done is not to discover the land, but to find the possibility of wholeness upon it.

I wish, without believing it, that "R. F. D." might be not merely one man's way but a lantern for the feet of others. So much has been written about young malcontents, such as Mr. Smart says he was, seeking escapes for themselves after John Reed and Nicolai Lenin and some others. By Mr. Smart's narrative such flights seem as irrelevant as alien. He has gone straight and safe, though not in ease, between pencil and sheepfold and between fancy farming and squalid grubbing to peaceful, even joyous, understanding of his place between the soil and the stars. I hope a best seller, such as this book already promises to be, will not disturb it but I wonder if a good price for his wool clip might not have better served serenity in Ross County. Fame, as is notorious, is strong drink for farmer—or philosopher. Fortunately Mr. Smart is both.

CHARLES ALLEN SMART AT OAK HILL, HIS OHIO FARM

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The Saturday Review
of Literature

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Those Who Can, Write

"HE who can, does. He who cannot, teaches." Thus the Bernard Shaw of 1903, in "Maxims for Revolutionists," which was an appendix to "The Revolutionist's Handbook," which was a supplement to "Man and Superman." By 1938, in "An Odor of Verbena," which is the coda of "The Unvanquished," Mr. Faulkner has made it: "I realized then the immitigable chasm between all life and all print—that those who can, do, those who cannot and suffer enough because they can't, write about it." And last fall when Mr. Hemingway wanted an epithet which would distil the quintessence of contempt, he achieved, "You writer!" He used it in a passage where its direct reference was sexual impotence, but the rest of the book made clear that writers are impotent in every other way as well. From 1903 to 1938, from peak to valley, thirty-five years. The period might be captioned: collapse of an eidelon.

For Mr. Shaw was also talking about writers—or, more generically, about The Artist. In his day it was the professor who was impotent—it was the writer who could. He was the inheritor of a notion which runs at least as far back as Shelley's "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," and which had its greatest flowering and acceptance during Mr. Shaw's impressionable years. Those were the years when The Artist cherished the highest valuation of himself he has ever been able to believe in, the years of Whistler's white forelock and lawsuits and "Gentle Art of Making Enemies," of *The Yellow Book* and the innumerable salons that were its sanctuary, of Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man under Socialism" which showed how art was going to remake society far more confidently than the Writers' Congress has been able to and in far better prose, of William Morris's more practicable revolution by means of wallpapers and book-bindings, of the fag end of Ruskin and the high noon of the Fabians and the earliest daybreak of H. G. Wells.

That was a time when The Artist was much more than anyone else; when he was, above all, generative. But in the current *Atlantic Monthly* Mr. Edmund Wilson obliquely expresses the modern contempt of literature by reproaching Mr. Shaw for being primarily The Artist. Mr. Wilson's allegation is not new. Mr. J. B. Collis's book of more than fifteen years ago made the same point, and Shaw himself has elaborated it over hundreds of autobiographical pages. But the thirty-five years of our caption have marked a complete overturn, and whereas Mr. Shaw and Mr. Collis thought of The Artist as generative, Mr. Wilson, in the latest manner, thinks of him as impotent. You see, very little legislation, acknowledged or unacknowledged, has Shaw's name on it; he has only written. Those who can, do; those who cannot, write.

A vocational neurosis of literary people is a compulsion to foul their own nest. Though it may show more varied symptoms today, it has always existed. Every Dick Roe of your acquaintance (we shall soon return to *Romans à Clef,* which also bears on this question) can tell you how barren and infertile are the ideas in Jack Doe's books, though Dick is confident that his own books are pretty seminal. But at this first step one avenue leads off straight to despair. For, armored in whatever humility to begin with, the Dick Roes of our literature could not help getting the idea that they are important. Look at the way people admire them, value their autographs, defer to their opinions, put them on programs, crowd to cocktail parties for a glimpse of them, and buy their books in such quantities that they must pay twice the income tax of a college president and ten times that of an astrophysicist. But that evidence carries a self-contained depth-bomb, for the income tax of a prize-fighter or an ice-skater is many times larger still, the crowds round a radio warbler are much more populous, and however the people may defer to the opinions of a writer they are far more deferent to those of an acquitted murderer, a halfback, or a movie star. And despair comes nearer still when the writer realizes that, after preaching repentance and reform to the people for thirty years, he has had no effect on them whatever.

Look at American society for the past generation. Incalculable energies have worked on it, unimaginable changes have been wrought in it—and writers have been a mere surface froth borne along by the energies, mere blobs of inert matter which have had changes inflicted on them but have had no active part in change. They have been ancestral voices prophesying wars: no one has heeded them and the wrong wars have come. They have been seers of visions beholding the good life and the great society for all men to bow down and worship them: the great society has never appeared and not a single knee has been crooked. Wars have come and gone, dynasties have fallen, despotisms have risen, the Dow-Jones average has climbed to 500 and sunk to minus-10: Dick Roe has tried to legislate about all these and has changed no vote but his own. This is the taste of quinine in the mouth of any Roe, but worst of all for those who have been making the revolution.

This seems to be the road-map to despair. The deputy sheriff, the Brain Truster, the union organizer have done something. The retailer, the health officer, the laboratory technician, the civil engineer, the county superintendent of schools have done something—moved something from here to there—modified a graph or index—changed a vote. But in moments when a gale blows out of the north, when the writer looks round him and sees a rip tide rising which he has neither set in motion nor added to, which he cannot control, which can control him—he feels as if his career has been only a vaudeville act, only a sedative for the leisure of fools, only something in a cage that people look at with some amusement on Sunday afternoons in Spring. And so, today's revulsion, the death wish, the cry of immolation: you *castrato,* you writer!

Why yes, writers are entitled to their portion of today's despair. Doubtless any man who faces the modern world with hope, who whistles along the broken arch, has more folly in him than can be admired. But the generality of mankind go about their business with something of resolution and fortitude, and especially with something of business pride. During the deluge and after it they will do the same; the gates of hell itself shall not prevail against them. It is possible that lobbyists and union organizers and garage mechanics are a tougher breed than writers; it is certain that they do not damn their own trades as impotent. And it is certain that literature's present self-revulsion is a compensation for an earlier and outrageous overvaluation. Perhaps we must breed selectively a new species of writers. They will have a humbler and more realistic idea of what literature can do—but they will also do their jobs with satisfaction and even with pride. It may have nothing to do with legislation, it may only be the job of using a cracked and aberrant lens to enregister chaos on paper. But they will do it without tearing their bowels in an agony of expiation. They will do it without tears, without despair. Those who can, will write.

Announcement

The Saturday Review of Literature announces the resignation, effective March 1, 1938, of Bernard DeVoto as Editor of the magazine. Mr. DeVoto is retiring in order to give his time to writing and literary research. The new Editor will be George Stevens, who has been Managing Editor of *The Saturday Review* since 1933. Mr. DeVoto will continue to be a frequent and valued contributor to the magazine, in so far as his other commitments will allow.

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Letters to the Editor: *Taking Sides in the Civil War*

Bugles Keep on Blowing

SIR:—There must be something remarkable about a book like "Bugles Blow No More" that will not down. I have made a study of the book, have read and reread it and discussed it before audiences made up of the literary-minded citizens of this neck of the woods. Consequently I feel it is not out of place to offer a reply to the letter of Eloise R. Lehnert in *SRL*, issue of February 12.

The present generation is singularly uninformed about the Civil War and is eagerly reading up on it, and is actively interested in what appears to it an unbelievable and almost fabulous episode in American history: that there were once two countries here with two presidents. Of the two countries so described the losing side is today the romantic side. Only yesterday I was reading "The Prairie Grove" in *The Atlantic Monthly* and found this situation ably referred to by Mr. Peattie. He says the people of Illinois do not figure in romance as "they are not a defeated people, nor a vanished people nor an anachronistic one." The people of the South of Civil War times are conceded by both sides to be all of these. Therefore their presence in romance is justifiable. They exist nowhere else. "Bugles Blow No More" and the rest of the group of Civil-War-inspired novels concern a defeated and vanished people.

In Mr. Benét's original review of "Bugles Blow No More" which appeared in *SRL* last May, he said he believed the partisanship was a little shrill. It wasn't shrill in Richmond. It shrieked to high heaven. How could a book about the Civil War be any good and not take sides?

"Bugles Blow No More" is written from the viewpoint of today, but the hatred and emotion the author describes are the hatred and emotion of 1865.

MARY COCHRAN.

Springfield, Ohio.

Well of Water

SIR:—Will you convey to your correspondent, Eloise R. Lehnert, my warmest thanks for her letter in your last issue? I wonder how many hundreds of "Unreconstructed Yankees" have greeted it as a well of water in a thirsty land. I only wish a copy might be sent to every reviewer about to pass upon a neo-Southern author.

ANOTHER UNRECONSTRUCTED YANKEE.

Cambridge, Mass.

"Moulders of Destiny"

SIR:—This author is indebted for the hospitality of your columns in an effort to correct a couple of false impressions that have been circulating since the appearance of Mr. Brinton's review of my "Moulders of Destiny"—also to answer collectively the twelve disconsolate *S.R.L.* readers who have sent me their condolences, or any other who feels inclined to make a disconsolate thirteenth.

The answers to Mr. Brinton's lesser criticisms are found on pages 1, 3, 9, 12, 13, and 20 of "Moulders of Destiny."

The illusion created by the Faust-like spring of individual Man in "about 1300" need hardly be refuted, certainly not for those patient persons who have read some of my own divagations on that subject during the past ten or twelve years.

An author's intentions, however, can be best explained by himself, so he offers them forthwith:

1.—To cover the entire epoch of the historic Renaissance (c. 1375-1625) in all the Western lands and in some of the Eastern, —and not merely the half-century of Italian history included by Mr. Ralph Roeder in his "Man of the Renaissance."

2.—To describe *how* and *why* certain revolutionary changes in art, morals, science, business, religion, statecraft, etc., were *popularized* for the first time since Roman days.

3.—To show that these revolutionary changes of this historic Renaissance, so-called, have had as many bad results as good ones, for example "in letting loose rampant individualism"—if I may quote a well known Oxford authority who has sought out my purposes with an eagle eye.

4.—To show how these revolutions led to some "degenerate modern concepts" regarding bourgeois centralization, totalitarianism, puritanism, political bureaucracy, nationalism, imperialism, etc.

5.—To depict the roles, both active and passive, that were played in these revolutions by ten individuals of either stained or haloed reputations (or of none at all) about whom most readers know little or nothing.

6.—To show that "the Renaissance we knew in school" was very far from being the real Renaissance, and to do so in words that any high school graduate can comprehend.

7.—To prove that there was no "unity" in the Renaissance and that there was no such thing as a typical "man of the Renaissance"—any more than in Ancient Athens, or, for that matter, as Mr. Brinton says, "on the all-Winooski Valley hockey team."

LLOYD WENDELL ESHLEMAN.

New York City.

"I GUESS I'LL READ THIS ONE. EVERYBODY I RECOMMENDED IT TO SAYS IT'S GOOD."

Prediction

Brothers and sisters of the quill,
We who once adored *intriguing,*
Using it with zeal until
Folks declared it quite fatiguing:

We who loved *meticulous*—
Replica—and slung them gaily,
Unpredictable, with us,
Having thorough workouts daily:

Greet the latest candidate,
Bard and columnist will choose it,
Pulps and slicks alike, elate,
Oft and erringly will use it.

Webster had it safely hid
Where 't would drive no reader frantic,
But Stuart Chase has raised the lid!
And realist and lush romantic

Will make it now the term preferred,
Ringing changes, some absurd,
On just another hapless word,
SEMANTIC!

MAY HENDERSON TAYLOR.

Los Angeles, Cal.

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The Enigma of Defoe

DEFOE. By James Sutherland. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1938. $3.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

THE life of no great English author presents such problems to the biographer as that of Daniel Defoe. Of his personal appearance the best description is an advertisement for his arrest. His library, when sold, was so mixed with that of another man that we cannot tell what books he read. His innumerable publications came into the world under such a shuffling variety of circumstance that we do not know what they were, what portion of them are fact and what portion fiction, or which of them represent Defoe's genuine convictions. Yet of all these hundreds of titles the world in general cares about only one, a book not written until Defoe was sixty. Living through the Restoration, the Glorious Revolution, the reigns of William and Mary and of Anne, and into the period of the Hanoverians, he formed no part of the brilliant Restoration literary circle or of the equally brilliant wits who glitter in the period of the *Spectator* papers, so that the biographer is compelled to dive into obscure state papers, traverse the marshy lands of the secret service, weigh Grub Street gossip, and catch at straws to fit together the career of a writer whom Pope scorned and Swift despised.

It is roughly true, moreover, that for forty years Defoe was not a literary man but a tradesman, and a tradesman furthermore who left behind a trail of legal records which certainly imply shady dealing; and yet the biographer must somehow equate this with the fact that in "The Complete English Tradesman" Defoe advocated diligence, application, thrift, and honesty to all merchants. When William was king, he wrote for the Tories; when Harley and Bolingbroke were in power, he wrote for the Whigs; and during the reign of George I, he wrote for both the Whigs and the Tories, always protesting his perfect consistency: "It was not," he said, "material to me what ministers Her Majesty was pleased to employ." The biographer who starts out to write the life of the famous fictionist soon discovers that he must be the chronicler of bankruptcy and factional strife.

As if this were not enough to confound the biographer, the question of the content and the sincerity of much of Defoe's work, even outside the realm of political pamphleteering, offers a series of puzzles. The "Memoirs of a Cavalier," which used to be cited as history, is fiction, but the "Journal of the Plague," though fiction, is so thoroughly grounded on what today we would call research as to be a trustworthy account.

Is it possible to rescue the personality of the writer from the mass of bibliographical puzzles, obscurities of conduct, pseudonymous publications, legal records, and gossip which surrounds him? What was the secret of a life so industrious and dull, a personality which took pleasure in mystifications and yet burst out ever and again into moments of extraordinary and dangerous frankness, a writer whose closing decades were spent as if he were "a sort of badger, a creature that comes out in the dark and avoids the more dangerous daylight?"

Mr. Sutherland's excellent biography works its way through the devious windings of Defoe's career with great precision and clarity. He resolves innumerable puzzles as he writes; and succeeds in keeping Defoe always before us. He has had to sacrifice much to attain this unity. Many of Defoe's works—and important works at that—are scarcely discussed. Because most of the biography necessarily has little to do with Defoe as a literary artist, we do not begin discussing the novels until the eleventh chapter. But the man does emerge from the cloud, or something extraordinarily like him.

What we do not see, what the incurious records of the classical period do not permit us to see, is the life of the inner man. After his brief, yet excellent, discussion of Defoe as novelist, Mr. Sutherland cannot even then tell us why he was driven to compose those fictions at once so dull and so fascinating. How shall one explain his smug satisfactions, his outraged sensibilities when some piece of duplicity is discovered, his quaint belief that he could patriotically serve two parties at once? How shall one explain the admirable courage which led him on three separate occasions, and perhaps oftener, to make his life over? We do not know the answers; probably we shall never know, though Mr. Sutherland's narrative comes as close to yielding them as any book about Defoe yet published.

DEFOE PILLORIED AT TEMPLE BAR
From "England in Picture, Song and Story" by J. W. Cunliffe (Appleton-Century).

Gadfly Journalism

UNDERGROUND NEWS. By Oscar E. Millard. New York: Robert M. McBride & Company. 1938. $2.75.

Reviewed by JOHN T. WINTERICH

THIS book, "the complete story of the secret newspaper that made war history," recounts the inception, career, influence, hairbreadth 'scapes, and triumphant termination of *La Libre Belgique*, the most famous fugitive propaganda organ ever attempted. It is a story to warm the heart of any who rejoice to see a rigid, pompous, humorless military despotism made ridiculous not only in the world's eyes but in its own.

La Libre Belgique was a thumb fixed to the nose of every loyal Bruxellois from February, 1915, to the end of the war. Designed from the first to appear at catch-as-catch-can intervals (or rather catch-as-catch-can't), it contrived to circulate with a periodicity which exceeded the fondest expectations of its proprietors, who delighted especially in the speedy issuance of a new number every time the blundering authorities had scooped up a sizeable company of distributors, editors, and printers and had, as they assumed, abated the nuisance for good and all.

Often it was touch and go. Two tramcars collided in the heart of Brussels and the street was strewn with bundles of the *Libre* which were rescued undetected. A member of the staff about to undergo routine search helped a German guard rekindle a dying fire by obligingly handing him a ready-crumpled copy of the *Libre*. A feldwebel in charge of two

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guards assigned to inspect a printing shop sat easily on a bench while the job was in progress, with the forms of the next number of the *Libre* almost pressing a proof into his buttocks. There is tragedy in the story—disease, privation, separation, brutality, imprisonment, and, more than once, the volley of the firing squad.

Mr. Millard's account is dramatic, perhaps a bit too much so, for the drama inherent in the facts hardly needed accenting. But his story is hardly "complete." One would wish to know more about the printers, the engravers, the full details of paper supply and financing. Moreover, at this late date it should have been possible to get many details from the German side. The narrative, in fact, reads much as if it had been written about the time Mr. Lloyd George was campaigning to hang the Kaiser. But the book, while it may occasionally irritate the reader by its omissions, will certainly hold his attention. And at the end he will ask himself whether any comparable undercover journalistic enterprises are being conducted in the belligerent and dictator countries of today, and, if so, why nothing is being written about them.

Mr. Winterich was on the staff of The Stars and Stripes *during the World War.*

How Captain Asgill Escaped Hanging

GENERAL WASHINGTON'S DILEMMA. By Katherine Mayo. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1938. $2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

SOMETIMES a detached historical episode, if carefully explored, dramatizes and illuminates a period of history, and leaves a more vivid impression than the full-dress record of an era. The affair of the diamond necklace cannot be given much space in histories of the French Revolution, but Carlyle's essay on it penetrates far into certain causes of the revolution; Froude's sketch of the rascally Alexander of Abonotichus in his "Short Studies" gives us a vivid sense of life in second century Asia Minor. Miss Mayo has attempted something of the sort in her present short and carefully wrought volume. The time is that anomalous period between Yorktown and the Peace of 1783; the scene is New York and New Jersey; the principal actors include Washington, Sir Henry Clinton, Sir Guy Carleton, Hamilton, Franklin, and (represented by their letters) Rochambeau, Vergennes, and the King and Queen of France; in the background are the quarreling loyalists and patriots of Monmouth County in Jersey, the narrow-minded and mean-spirited majority of the Continental Congress, the regular armies of Britain and America. The central figures are two gallant British officers, Captain Charles Asgill and Major James Gordon. How Captain Asgill came near meeting the

KATHERINE MAYO

same tragic fate as Nathan Hale and Major André (though for a different reason) and how he was saved, is a stirring story. But it is more than a stirring incident; it brings to life again some of the passions of that stormy time, it makes human beings of Washington and certain of the other figures we have named, and it gives us a realizing sense of the atmosphere in which the war was closing.

Not that Miss Mayo's book is at all pretentious; one of its merits is its straightforward simplicity. It merely relates how the American high command worked itself into an impossible moral position, and how then the pressure of half Europe was exerted to help it work out again. This is the story of how Tory partisans killed Jack Huddy in Monmouth County; how mob opinion demanded vengeance; how all the superior officers of Washington's army advised the retaliatory execution of a British officer; how Congress ratified this advice; how Washington then took steps which led to poor Asgill's selection for hanging; and how the Commander-in-Chief, seeing that he stood on untenable ground, got off it.

It is an appealing story. It carries us back into a period when war had its chivalrous side; when life was not so cheap as in this day of wholesale bombings of civilians and mass executions of prisoners. It shows how at the end of a long conflict sentiments of humanity still ran across national boundaries and wide seas. It is interesting in its depiction of Washington's conscience struggling with his dignity. We catch glimpses of important figures in characteristic attitudes—Hamilton decisive in opinion, and brilliantly shrewd; Franklin hedging and cautious; Knox blunt and soldierlike; Rochambeau lofty and magnanimous. But the real hero is neither Washington, nor one of the French leaders, not Asgill; it is Asgill's devoted comrade Gordon, who as Miss Mayo shows, was willing to lay down his life for his friend—and in the end did so. Just how, is a part of the story we must leave for her to tell.

Convict Colony

DRY GUILLOTINE. By René Belbenoit. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. $3.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

DEVIL'S ISLAND is a sort of seventh circle of the French penal colony in Guiana, which has become almost as much of a place of punishment for American readers as for French criminals. This time it is the subject of a book by one more who has made the "only successful escape" in the seventy-five years since the colony was established. The narrative opens with an introduction that does not inspire confidence, since the Comtesse d'Entreneuse, for robbing whom M. Belbenoit is supposed to have received his sentence, is unknown to the Almanach de Gotha, and the details of the author's war experience are remarkable in the extreme.

But these are passed swiftly by in a foreword that has little to do with the main work, which has a "horror" in the first paragraph and a synonym for it in almost every paragraph thereafter. The events of the Guiana experience are such as to merit the descriptive noun with all the adjectives one could pile around it, consisting of the elements long since familiar to amateurs of Biribi literature—heat, cruelty, perversion, starvation, official corruption, attempts to escape. In the present case they are furnished with such elaborate and perfectly described supporting detail that their general authenticity can hardly be doubted.

Yet the book carries an inner self-criticism which furnishes at least a partial answer to the question. Belbenoit has been clapped into solitary confinement on the Ile St. Joseph in this most revealing incident, where men go mad for lack of human contacts. He hears a rapping on his cell-wall; his next-door neighbor is conversing with him in the prison telegraphic code:

> I listened eagerly for his name.
> I—N—A—U—D—I, he answered.
> Hell! It was only a stupid, bestial convict . . . There went my chance of having intelligent companionship near at hand. He continued tapping for several minutes, but I wouldn't answer him.

Nor did he, ever. In other words, our friend the author was provided with so large an organ of selfishness that he would rather go insane himself and have the other man go too, than talk to a "stupid, bestial convict." Well, selfishness can also be an armor. Insulated in it, Belbenoit pulled through fifteen years of Guiana imprisonment, achieved success on his sixth attempt to escape, lived idyllically with a native bride among the San Blas Indians, reached Los Angeles as a stowaway, and wrote a book which, if it adds little to what was already known about the colony, is worth placing among the more intimate and unashamed journals of personal revelation.

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Sweet Jungles

BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL. By Marius Fortie. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1938. $3.50.

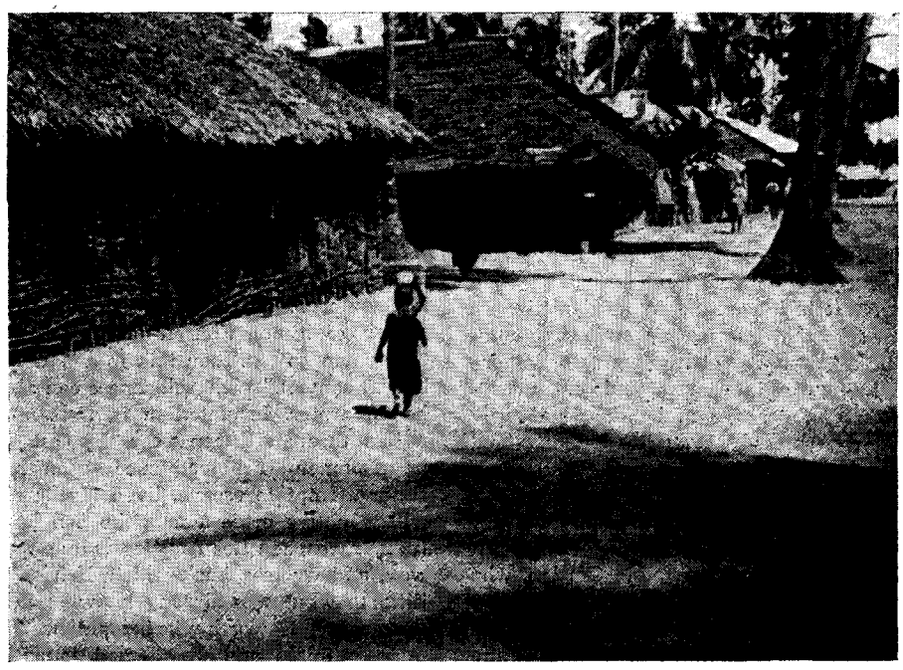
Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

HERE is a personal narrative that deals with miscegenation in a manner that is not only frank but romantic and lusty and thoroughly clean. Mr. Fortie's devotions are not overemphasized; they are not sensational; they fill their proper place in his autobiography to show, more than anything else, the bonds that hold him to his sweet jungles. Expatriate from Italy at nineteen, malcontent in Asia and America, he found the black Bantus of Tanganyika to be most nearly akin to him, and he loves them proudly.

The Abyssinian Omar Sayid was his first and final friend in Africa. When the young Marius traveled on safari to establish trading posts in the Great Lakes region it was Omar Sayid who backed him spiritually. He had no white companions on those long marches. Each native girl who accompanied him, sometimes for years, gave to him a love that was inestimably precious in a land swarming with suspicion and danger: the poisoned milk of stupid tribes, malaria, blackwater fever, puff adders, lions, hyenas that bit off noses, sorcerers' crocodiles, and tsetse flies. He was too young at first to value this love as later he was compelled to do. Mirembe, whom he had bought for a hundred rupees, he sent back to her people because he was afraid of degenerating to the native level. Kito and Ndimila he returned gratefully to their proprietors. The gentle Panya, who warned the ants away from his big feet and put flowers in his gun, he married to his clerk with the welcome dowry of his own half-caste child. But it was Zahabu, the Golden, who broke his heart. "I hid my head in the blankets, in grief, not in shame, at my dead love . . ."

Mr. Fortie writes simply and poignantly of that day when because of a malicious word there rose in him a revulsion from all things African, when he turned his back on Zahabu and drove away his devoted Omar Sayid at the point of a gun. He traveled around the world to find no content anywhere, and returned to plant rubber trees in Safariland. But during his next absence the World War wiped out his plantation, and dispersed his friends over thousands of miles of what was now mandated British and Belgian territory.

His last visit to Africa was the sentimental journey of the second half of the book. Twenty-five years had passed. At the age of fifty-three he commenced safaris that were to take him on foot over 3,000 miles to find the people he had denied. One by one he found them, with his many sons and daughters and grandchildren, all better for the sound white blood with which he had infused them. But there had been changes. Mirembe's lovely eyes had been blinded by a spitting cobra. The mind of Omar Sayid, misty with age, could scarcely comprehend the white man who asked his forgiveness for an injustice committed many years ago. Mr. Fortie could help them all financially, but he felt his greater duty was to publish the havoc that oppressive taxation, unsympathetic administration, and civilized fraud have wreaked upon a race that in sheer nobility of character excels its lords.



THE NATIVE SECTION OF TANGA.—*From "Black and Beautiful."*

This book is Africa at its brightest and darkest, with all its savagery, passion, kindliness, with the rich, hot scent of it on every page. There will be some who will quarrel with the author's ethics, but his book must none the less be recognized as a rare, whole portrait of Safariland and of himself.

Wife of a Genius

MARY SHELLEY. By R. Glynn Grylls. New York: Oxford University Press. 1938. $7.50.

Reviewed by MILTON CRANE

IRONICALLY enough, it was Mary Shelley's fate to be always, more or less willingly, fortune's fool. The only child of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, it was her lot to put her father's principles into practice. Radical and intellectual England, which had expected so much from the daughter of such parents, was shocked at the unconventionality of her relations with Shelley, and saw nothing inconsistent in Godwin's renunciation of her.

At the age of seventeen, she met Shelley, who had already grown tired of Harriet, and the two free spirits went off to the Continent, thoughtfully taking Mary's stepsister with them. Thereafter, their life together was to retain the hectic quality of their strange elopement. Harriet's convenient death made it possible for them to marry and regain the not altogether desirable blessing of the Godwins. They spent the next five years as expatriates in Italy, their far from idyllic life culminating in Shelley's tragic death.

Mary Shelley's importance, alone, and in relation to Shelley, is rather questionable. Her eternal melancholy darkened the happiest days of her life with the poet. Her literary achievements are comparatively negligible. What she is to be remembered for—and it is this on which R. Glynn Grylls has so much depended—is the account of Shelley she has left us in her "Journal." She lived with greatness, and it is in that relation and for it that she is known. The twenty-nine years that elapsed between Shelley's death and her own she spent jealously conserving her husband's memory for the world and in building up a literary reputation in a markedly unfriendly London.

Her newest biographer has been fortunate enough to obtain access to hitherto unpublished sources which cast considerable light on the latter half of Mary Shelley's life. The emphasis of the biography lies chiefly on its sources. A strong and not illogical anti-Byron bias is everywhere evident; various letters prove him to be almost incredibly malicious toward the Shelleys. "Mary Shelley" is a charming, unidealized portrait of a naïve and courageous woman who learned painfully that it is not enough to be a free spirit.

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The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

Toulemonde: the Golden Germ

(Or, Dogs Don't Bark at the Milkman)

NOW . . .
Coffee drunk, and mail collected,
newspaper read and telephone not ringing
(Alliteration chiming in the skull)
Comes verse, the always mischievously candid.
She has to wait
Until compulsories abate
But when the tides of rumbling prose
Are out, along the elastic beach she goes
Picking up shells and sharkteeth that were stranded.
She and I, each other's each,
Are never lonely on that beach.
Our joy to reaffirm
I sing you the Golden Germ.

Here, in this clear February pause,
Tarry, forenoon blue; mind, catch up, draw level
And all else go to the devil.
O sweet brief month, O February
Of ills examined and health preferred,
O mystical preliminary
Of Word made flesh—and flesh made word.
O earliest thought of naked Spring,
How pink she lounges after bath
Unconsciously exhibiting
Her slopes of cream, her bronzy swath:
But be not tattletale in Gath:
When goddesses have nothing on
We nuncupate, and leave to wrath
The publishers in Askelon.
Though Spring smell lavender as Yardley
Need I tell the world? Well hardly.

But the moon's at full and crystalline
To chandelier Saint Valentine
And telephone girls in fiscal choir
Sing western unions over the wire:
Sentimental Uncle Sam'll
Walk a mile for a friendly mammal
And physicists recall with cheers
Magdeburg's twin hemispheres:
So unaborted
By things I've seen, and heard reported
(Even the fate of the Escorial
Or this morning's editorial)
I keep my faith in the absurd
Where Life by Laughter is escorted.

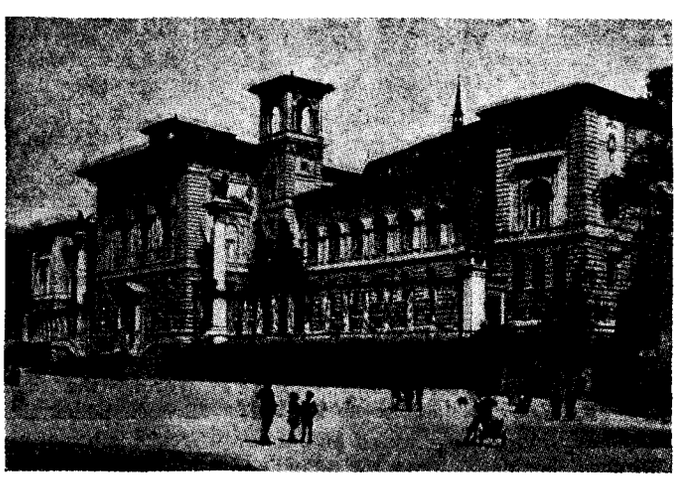
This February pause . . .
I've so indulged my proclivity for activity
That just because
I'm happily alone, not answering the phone
And plainly trying to think, I feel almost caitiff,
As though I were shirking, not working;
As though I ought to be dictative, acknowledging letters
Or rush-arounding
(More hounded against, I swear, than hounding)
In a state of nettlerash and jitters.
That's what life does to you if you let it.
A wise man once wrote down (I don't forget it)
Three rules of conduct, fit to be triple-starred:
One, Don't work too hard;
Two, Don't chew your pills but swallow them;
Three, Tell 'em all to go to hell.
He said well,
And I try to follow them.

The sun slants round my Palais de Rumine:
Today's no landscape soft in aquatint
But stencilled sharp on twig and bright horizon;
Clear and bold and crude, like a cartoon.
We've had our morning flush of printers' Epsom,
The world is innocent with busy trade
Till evening papers try again to rouse
Man's easy rage or sluggish merriment
And swell my copious glands of disbelief.
The Editor perhaps is wise and pensive,
It isn't he who writes those heads offensive:
The man who has to write the ramping headline
Is under the alarum of a deadline,
And a deadline is where something dies
And you know what. Well, life is compromise.

The danger time for thought is moody noon:
Why rub the nerve to persevere for truth?
Most are not interested; why should they care?
(Longer than he lived was Lincoln dead
Before men chose to hear what life he led).
In the hour of apathy and phlegm
We fall back on our saddest apothegm:
"Men are most useful if they do not know
And what's by all believed is rarely so;
Your dearest doctrine, if the crowd it moves,
Turns inside out and rapidly disproves."

I didn't mean to be so desultorious:
I'm forgetting the Golden Germ.
Staphylococcus is the technical term,
Staphylococcus aureus;
So called because it looks like a bunch of grapes,
But, if annoyed, a Tarzan of the Apes.
Some quite casual boil or scratch
May chance a golden germ to hatch
(If I'm vague in my bacteriology
I make apology)
Perhaps your armpit begins to hurt,
And a vein of fever runs up under your shirt,
Then the doctor sees that his knives are sterile
And your whole arm's in peril.

(Continued on next page)



LAUSANNE UNIVERSITY: PALAIS DE RUMINE

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Toulemonde: the Golden Germ

(Continued from preceding page)

Then you're not so keen about autonomy
And prefer a planned economy.
Free competition doesn't seem so right
Between *staphylococcus* and phagocyte:
Come, physician! Put my hand in poultice,
Give me a drug in which some healing volt is,
Come antibodies, sulfanilamide!
Up Doctor Jekyll, down with Mr. Hyde!

If this should be the end, it seems a pity:
Gosh, everything was such fun, I hate to leave it;
Loving the world, I'm sorry to bereave it—
And I never wrote my book on New York City. . . .
But the phagocytes, when the other bug gets near 'em
Evolve protective lymph, a yellow serum,
And after several days that try the soul
The trouble's in control.

While your friends are saying how they'll miss you
You're granulating epithelial tissue;
And grateful to the doctor, you thank God he's
On the side of the antibodies.
But not till after you've grown a new epiderm
Do you philosophize the Golden Germ.
Your chance for this little metrical defiance
You owe, most likely, to unboasting science.
Though the conclusion shock us
I'm afraid it's true:
God esteems *staphylococcus*
As much as he does me or you.
This, in case we never knew it,
We better make our minds up to it.
Occasionally it is man's mission
To regulate free competition.

Fact is fact and will be so
Whether Congress sits or no;
Whether you silk or whether you cotton use
The squares of the legs are the squared hypotenuse.
Well-trained dogs, of whatever ilk,
Don't growl at the man who brings the milk.
Truth, like milk, arrives in the dark
But even so, wise dogs don't bark.
Only mongrels make it hard
For the milkman to come up the yard.

Most of all men, I adore
Who tells me what I knew before
And with such tact that we agree—
Not I with him, but he with me!

Thoughts of this general complexion
Came from a Golden Germ infection.
The lovely day passed unaware:
I went to taste the Sunset air—
Already Orion's Belt was there.

Play in Poetry

(*Continued from page* 4)

Pounded on the table,
Beat an empty barrel with the handle
of a broom,
Hard as they were able,
Boom, boom, BOOM,
With a silk umbrella and the handle
of a broom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM.

In Frost the humor is far more subtle; it is the humor of reservation, of philosophic banter, of understatement—the understatement of the most significant detail. In some of the poems the humor is instinctive and forthright. Even his titles betray his love of double meaning; "Mountain Interval" and "A Further Range" have the nature of puns and "North of Boston" turns a geographical direction into a spiritual suggestion. Humor invades the most serious and tragic of the poems; the very depth and intensity of "The Fear" are emphasized by its climactic anti-climax; "The Self-Seeker" pits the horror of its subject against a broad pungency of tone; "Mending Wall" is an extended piece of persiflage. Even "The Death of the Hired Man" half conceals its pathos in asides about self-respect and the way to build a load of hay, in differences as to the definition of "home" and the sheer fancy of the passage where the moon falls down the west, "dragging the whole sky with it to the hills." Perhaps "Birches" is the best example of this gravely quizzical humor. "Birches" begins with pure observation, but the angle of observation is a peculiar one; observation soon gives way to imagination, and the poem develops into a fantasy of trees arching in the woods

. . . trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that
throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in
the sun.

Suddenly the poet interrupts himself in the midst of his fancies:

But I was going to say when truth
broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the
ice-storm . . .

This, of course, is sheer play, the play not only of understatement but of contradiction. The poet has been dealing with anything but matters of "fact," and his truth is true only in the way that instinct and imagination are the truths of poetry.

In the lyrics the humor is still more marked. The sharply turned "Fire and Ice" is a sardonic epigram masking a speculation about that popular topic, the end of the world. Its grim conclusion etches itself in the mind:

I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

It is revealing to compare Frost's brusque conclusion with Archibald MacLeish's treatment of the same theme. In MacLeish's sonnet, "The End of the World," the débâcle comes during a Breughel-like circus, while one set of freaks is performing for another, the top of the tent blows off, and there, overhead, there hung over

Those thousands of white faces, those
dazed eyes,
There in the starless dark, the poise,
the hover,
There with vast wings across the cancelled skies,
There in the sudden blackness, the
black pall
Of nothing, nothing, nothing—nothing
at all.

MacLeish obtains irony with tension by a skilful accumulation of suspense and repetition; Frost achieves it by the concentration of philosophic undertones.

Elsewhere the effect is frankly comic, as in "The Cow in Apple Time," which begins:

Something inspires the only cow of late
To make no more of the wall than an
open gate—

The humor is implicit in such a couplet, explicit in such a phrase as the mock-pedantic "of late." It is lightly ironic in "Plowmen," farcical in "Brown's Descent,

(*Continued on page* 16)

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 204)

PUBLIUS VERGILIUS MARO—"AENEID"

Sprung from blood of gods, son of
Trojan Anchises, easy is the descent
to
Avernus; night and day the door of
Gloomy Dis stands open; but to recall thy
Steps and pass out to the upper air,
this is the
Task, this the toil!

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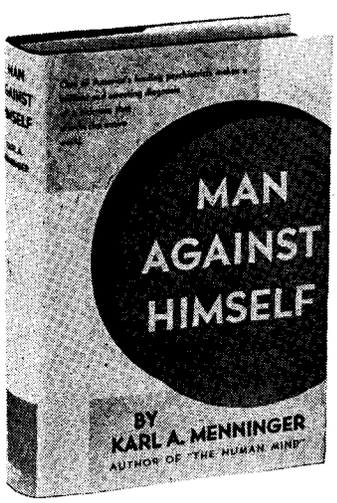

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THE FIRST REVIEW:

This book will leave you with the jubilant conviction of reason beyond chaos and a sort of crusading determination to make your cousins and your children and your aunts share its wisdom.

Starting with Freud's theory that the death instinct in all of us parallels the instinct of self-preservation, Dr. Menninger proceeds through a lucid development of ways for harmonizing the two. What makes you devil your husband or suspect your wife; why do some people whoop it up for war and others pray for peace; why do we overdrink, why indeed do we get a stomach-ache? These are questions the Doctor meets every day in his clinic. He believes the reason hides inside a larger question—why do we all want to commit suicide, whether slowly or with a bang?

Whatever you think of psychoanalysis, the stories and arguments of this book will shoot a gleam into the black corners of your own unexplored or unhappy experience. With grave and passionate concern for a society in which more hospital beds are occupied by the mentally ill than by those suffering from any other disease, Dr. Menninger pleads that a cure can start only from understanding. Though he looks toward a time when sanity will be as much a public concern as sanitation, he plans no Utopia with every congressman a Freudian scholar. MAN AGAINST HIMSELF is rather timed and geared to the individual, and it should set a good many wheels to turning in the right direction.

—The Forum, *March Issue.*

HARCOURT, BRACE & CO., 383 Madison Ave., New York

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Play in Poetry

(*Continued from page* 14)

or The Willy-Nilly Slide," politically Socratic in "Build Soil," critical in "The White-tailed Hornet," deliberately mocking in "Departmental, or The End of My Ant Jerry," bitterly satiric in "The Peaceful Shepherd":

If heaven were to do again,
And on the pasture bars
I learned to line the figures in
Between the dotted stars,

I should be tempted to forget,
I think, the Crown of Rule,
The Scales of Trade, the Cross of Faith,
As hardly worth renewal.

For these have governed in our lives,
And see how men have warred!
The Cross, the Crown, the Scales, may all
As well have been the Sword.

I stress, perhaps unduly, the humorous element, since Frost has been praised for almost everything but this quality. If I maintain that no poet in America has ever so effectively combined play and profundity it is only because it has usually been the critic's habit to appraise the latter and neglect the former. Frost has been praised for the unity of his thought, for the intellectual steadfastness which is not deceived by the schools and slogans of the moment. He has been applauded for the symmetry of his form and the shapeliness of his technique. He has been acclaimed as one who unearthed a new kind of poetry from old and stony soil, finding his material in what was "common in experience, uncommon in writing." It is not yet ascertainable by what name he will be labelled by the literary historian of the future. Contemporary theses have been written proving Frost to be a classicist, a symbolist, a humanist, a synecdochist (Frost's own half-serious classification), a centrist, and a glorified neighbor. All these designations are plausible, all have some justification, and none is an accurate measure of the man. He is actually far more radical than the extremists. But his is an old radicalism, not dependent on political shibboleths or technical eccentricities; it is highly personal radicalism, not unlike the individual insurgence of Thoreau and the quiet but thoroughgoing rebellion of Emerson. Frost has always questioned routines of thought, he has disguised his intransigence in raillery, in offstage whispers, in teasing circumlocutions, but his penetrations have been none the less thorough. If I were called upon to add to the categories, I would drop the classicist, the bucolic realist, and the political humanist. I would call him a revisionist. It is his power not only to restate, but to revise too easily accepted conclusions, a power which no contemporary has equalled.

But he is a revisionist who is also a humorist, if the term can be separated from its vaudeville implications and newspaper columnist connotations. In his introduction to Robinson's posthumous "King Jasper" Frost wrote, "The style is the man. Rather say the style is the way the man takes himself; and to be at all charming or even bearable, the way is almost rigidly prescribed. If it is with outer seriousness, it must be with inner humor. If it is with outer humor, it must be with inner seriousness. Neither one alone without the other under it will do." The sentences were written as a tribute to Robinson; essentially they are an almost perfect description of Frost himself. His style, so characteristic, so seemingly simple and yet so elusive, so colloquial and yet so elevated, has a way of uniting opposites. It combines fantasy with matter-of-fact; or, rather, it is not so much a combination as an alteration, an intellectual legerdemain in which fact becomes fancy and the fancy is more compelling than the fact.

That Frost is both a revisionist and a humorist must be apparent to those who closely examine the alternating play of inner and outer humor in the "Collected Poems," but it is equally discernible in the highly playful "Wilful Homing," which appears here for the first time in print and has more than a little in common with Robinson's "Mr. Flood's Party." There is the same blend of uncertainty and determination, the same flicker of double meanings, the same shifts of mockery and tenderness. But no one can confuse the two inflections; slight though the poem is, its turns of phrase and idea make it indubitably Frost's. Here again is the quiet, careful humor of understatement.

WILFUL HOMING

It is growing late and time he drew to a house,
But the blizzard blinds him to any house ahead.
The snow gets down his neck in a chilly souse
That sucks his breath like a wicked cat in bed.

The snow blows on him and off him, exerting force
Downward to make him sit astride a drift,
Imprint a saddle, and calmy consider his course.
He peers out shrewdly into the thick and swift.

Since he means to come to a door he will come to a door,
Although so compromised of aim and rate;
He may fumble wide of the latch a yard or more,
And to those concerned he may seem a little late.

Such contrasting poetry transcends its material; it makes the reader aware of depths beyond the subject. The reader is grateful not because he has learned something, but because he has experienced something. He has drawn strength and serenity, but, perhaps most of all, he has fed on surprise. "Give us," wrote Frost, "immedicable woes—woes that nothing can be done for—woes flat and final. And then to play. The play's the thing. Play's the thing."

The teachers who tell us there must be a purpose in poetry are unquestionably right; no poet can escape his serious destiny. But, unless he can discard the leaping metaphor, the incalculable music, the free imagination, nothing can be done without play—"play's the thing"—especially when play has a purpose of its own.

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Housman as an Editor

M. MANILII ASTRONOMICON. Edited by A. E. Housman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (New York: Macmillan). 1938. 5 vols. $12.50.

Reviewed by LEONARD BACON

THIS astounding book is the last kick of the Revival of Learning. For centuries the queer dull poem of Manilius has been much edited and little read. Poggio Bracciolini snatched the corpse from a monastic library in the Alps. Bentley experimented on the vile body. And only yesterday a great poet finished the labor of a lifetime, leaving us a text and a comment which are a portent and an example.

The reviewer hastens to come clean. His knowledge of Manilius, a poet so pedantic and obscure that he does not appear in the Loeb series and is unnoticed in the myriad-minded Columbia Encyclopedia, is derived from a cursory inspection ad hoc of a seventeenth century translation. And this is a great deal more than most critics would do for him. Manilius seems to have been one of those writers, by no means rare, who combine an interest in complicated subjects with feeble-mindedness. He is so dull that there is very little point in reading his hodge-podge of astrology. And in any case it makes no difference, for his editor is the real subject of this review.

Why Housman edited Manilius at all I do not know. Perhaps it was mere perversity of the high divine mind. Perhaps it was ghastly pleasure in applying every refinement of learning to the elucidation of the banal, the false, and the pedestrian. Perhaps it was penance self-imposed for a crackerjack of a secret sin. Perhaps it was undertaken in mere contempt of previous editors, Germans for choice. Perhaps all these motives entered in, and many more. Anyhow, if the inexpert may judge, further labor is unnecessary. As a text the book is probably final, though dying thunders may rumble for a little in Leipzig and Oxford.

But that is unimportant. What counts for the layman is the spectacle of Housman's mind. In the whole bede-roll of mighty scholars in their misery dead, there is not another who has written with such devastating and magnificent fury concerning his author, the rigmarole of critical method, and the folly of man. The sentences scorch your brain as you read. There are whole philippics shut in a paragraph. The excoriation of some luckless German literally reminds you, for terror and dignity, of Demosthenes against the Macedonian. Or you think trembling of Diomed exulting as he strips the slain Trojan of his armor.

And the whole is such English as will make any lover of clear and clean-limbed prose stare and gasp with astonishment and delight. Here is effortless felicity, every sentence crammed with meaning, every meaning interesting, novel, and true. And let no moron talk of great powers wasted, of settling *hoti's* business, and the doctrine of the enclitic *de*. For it is too apparent that when a great man undertakes a task which seems unimportant he infects it with his own greatness.

For ominous wit and blasting judgment this book makes our bitterest contemporaries seem vapid and saccharine. Having dived beneath the wave *(nulla ostreosior unda)* I shall submit a few specimens snatched from the pearl bed.

Here for instance apropos of manipulators of text in general: "The worst of having no judgment is that one never misses it." Of one of the Germans whom he tosses and gores: "I do not regard his words as a piece of impudence; I regard them simply as speech divorced from thought." Again a grim verdict to which not only scholars are liable: "Error, if allowed to run its course, secures its own downfall, and is sooner or later overthrown, not by the truth, but by error of an opposite kind." And bitterer yet: "The faintest of human passions is the love of truth."

It was not the faintest of Housman's passions. A great poet, a great man of learning, he had the noble desire to be explicit and illuminating. In everything he wrote there is something magnificently faithful, however much he may have shared the attributes of Bentley and Swift. One of Swift's attributes he had completely. He could write beautifully about a broomstick. He has proved it in his prolegomena to Manilius.

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Fiction Drowned in Talk

THE JOURNEY DOWN. By Aline Bernstein. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. $2.50.

Reviewed by BERNARD DEVOTO

MRS. BERNSTEIN'S novel deals, in nine episodes, with the love affair between a great literary genius and this year's most sensitive spirit, a woman who paints, designs costumes for the theater, and talks in phrases by Black, Starr, Frost & Gorham. Neither he nor she is ever given a name, but the third story in Mrs. Bernstein's earlier "Three Blue Suits," which deals with the same people and fits in here just after the fifth episode, shows that his name is Eugene. Little characterization is expended on him and, in fact, little attention is paid to him. He is gigantic physically and suffers from a kind of giantism in his speech and in his ideas about himself, which the lady shares. He makes love to her by telling her that she comes from a dung hill, that she belongs to the stable, that she is a flower growing from filth, that her breasts are like melons, that she smells like a Jew. He models his behavior on the romantic tradition of geniuses. He forgets to turn off the faucets in the bathroom, he stands shaving and seeing visions for hours on end, he works all night writing indescribably magnificent prose, he weeps and also has ecstasies—that sort of thing. All his adjectives have a high amperage, he bellows and throws people about, his phantasies are populated by malevolent enemies who are trying to inflict immeasurable cruelties on him. He seems to be, that is, a megalomaniac. He would have been an interesting character if some use had been made of him in the novel, but his only function is to start the lady talking.

This is the usual mechanism of the episodes: after some prefatory matter, the genius says, "Tell me what you saw this morning," "Tell me what it was like when you were a little girl," or "Tell me about the vegetables in your garden," and the lady tells him for thirty pages of genuine, hand-painted prose. She is hell on overtones and nuances, and determined to let none of them escape her. Her ailment would appear to be systemic hyperaesthesia complicated by logorrhoea. It is fine talk and even finer writing, the kind of tense and mannered sensibility that furnished forth the little magazine of twenty years ago, an attempt to sublimate pure mood. Ineffable but unbearably portentous moods turn on the curve of a parsley leaf, a glimpse of a face in the city street, the colors of sky and foliage in that one moment when the luminous twilight pauses and seems trembling toward revelation. The lady is as sensitive as possible to all forms of beauty; she has a low flash-point and a hair-trigger. But fiction gets drowned in talk. The reader perks up in one episode when a fortune teller succeeds in getting the ball away from her, but the seeress also is sensitive and talks in just the same way. The point of the novel is that the genius discarded the lady, who alone of all women understood and loved him, but the reader can take that with composure. She merely talked herself out of a job.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	*Crime, Place, Sleuth*	*Summing Up*	*Verdict*
THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED NUDE *William Gore* (Crime Club: $2.)	River Thames disgorges painting and naked corpse. Insp. Penk invades surrealistic circles to find solution.	Penk's adventures among advanced artists add hilarious spice to yarn that violates sundry rules but has zest.	Unusual
THE CLOUDED MOON *Max Saltmarsh* (Knopf: $2.50.)	Sudden death of girl and detective on Riviera plunge novelist Stern and friend Lumsden into maelstrom.	Modicum of mystery but plenitude of thrills in tale of clever criminals, devil worship, and blazing forests.	Thriller
BRIGADE OF SPIES *Wm. J. Makin* (Dutton: $3.) (Non-fiction)	Huge amount of inside—and some old—stuff about post-war spies and their machinations in Europe and Asia.	Writing verges on Sunday-supplementish, but facts are fascinating—especially "Spies of Science" section.	Sinisterly informative
MIDNIGHT AND PERCY JONES *Vincent Starrett* (Covici-Friede: $2.)	Concert singer shot; radio announcer vanishes; another killing—and drama critic Blackwood spots third death before case closes.	Chicago night life, cynically amusing cops, bullet spattered climax, plentiful red herrings, and gruesome solution, expertly blended.	Worth while
MURDER ON THE NOISE *George Bagby* (Crime Club: $2.)	Crooner slain as broadcast ends. Insp. Schmidt learns much about radio, uncovers slick racket, nets slayers.	Inside dope on addled antics of air-wavers and bountiful action quell doubts about method of major murder.	Higher brackets

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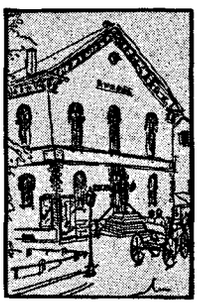

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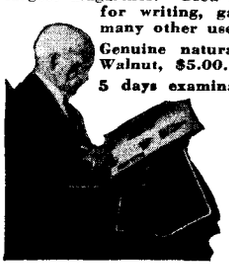

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The New Books

Belles Lettres

FREE SPEECH AND PLAIN LANGUAGE. By Albert Jay Nock. Morrow. 1937. $3.

Albert Jay Nock is an old-fashioned liberal individualist. He fancies himself as a citizen of that purely imaginary republic of which Thomas Jefferson was prophet and high priest. Mr. Nock spends much time in Belgium and in a realm of ideas which brook no concessions to expediency or even to practicality. He writes lean, athletic English tinged with an ironic humor akin to that of the eighteenth century British essayist. He writes well.

"Free Speech and Plain Language" is an assortment of essays most of which were first published as magazine articles. Mr. Nock's articles are his conversations with himself which he paused to write upon paper. Very good conversation, too. He believes in free speech without reservation. His kind of free speech is possible only to those rare persons who know precisely what they mean when they use words. He presupposes a degree and a spread of intelligence and wisdom difficult to locate in any land.

His arguments are so fundamental that in places he seems to be irresponsible. This is because he is following to the end the logic of his belief. Surrenders to expediency are, in his scheme, the sin against the Holy Ghost. The philosophers who measure the worth of principles by the consequences which flow from them are not the saints of this system.

But whether we accept or reject the teachings of so detached and remote an observer, his book provides pleasant reading for more than one evening's leisure.

W. L. C.

Fiction

ROOT IN THE ROCK. By D. H. Southgate. Knopf. 1938. $2.50.

The native brown races have preoccupied a good many novelists this year. The task of interpreting customs, minds, religions, and speech idioms into an English which will make them seem veritable and moving is a formidable one. Unfortunately the reader is callously untouched either by the amount of research a writer may have put into assembling his material or the amount of genuine fervor which has pushed him into writing the book. The actual words on the actual pages are all he sees or can feel. And the actual words on the actual pages of "Root in the Rock" did not, for us, do the trick of taking India and the Brahmin woman Latchmi out of the factual descriptions of any of several non-fiction books on the same subject and giving them independent fictional life.

Because it is apparent that the author has taken pains, has gathered information, and is genuinely disturbed by the plight of the Brahmin woman, it seems unkind to say that the book does not come off. Nevertheless, as fiction, it does not. Latchmi is a child bride. Her sufferings, the shame of her sterility, the son who is finally "given" her by a temple "god," the horror of life in her mother-in-law's house, and the cruelty of her position as a widow are sociologically moving; but they are not fiction. When her son becomes a medical student, outraging and breaking with his caste, when the son's daughter in her turn tries to throw off India and embrace the West, the book is a treatise, and a serious one. But it bears the same relation to a novel that the Red Cross float in the Armistice Day parade bears to a dressing station behind the front lines.

I have no doubt that the author has lived in India. It is entirely possible that he (or she, the initials reveal nothing, but the writing seems to be that of a woman) is an Indian. But, unlike Pearl Buck, unlike Vicki Baum who has lately and rather surprisingly made the Balinese protagonists of a good novel, D. H. Southgate is not a story teller. Louis Bromfield's "The Rains Came," set in India and beyond question written with less high purpose than "Root in the Rock," nevertheless makes its Indian characters more believable people, more vividly seen, than any in this book, for all its creator's earnestness.

F. W.

ENCHANTED OASIS. By Faith Baldwin. Farrar & Rinehart. 1938. $2.

Take a lovely young girl; give her peach-blossom skin inherited from the English lady of title who died in giving her birth, and hair the color of a new penny inherited (together with a fabulous number of new dollars) from an American father; transport her from the beech woods of Sussex to Palm Springs; compromise her in a canyon with a rich, handsome, and idealistic pseudo-cowboy; stir and spice with a wicked stepmother; garnish with a hard-boiled movie star faithful beyond death though in heart alone, of course, to the no-count gambler she married when a child; and you almost have Faith Baldwin's latest. Almost, but not quite; because Miss Baldwin is a little better than her formulas, and at her most saccharine can surprise you with her deftness and her capacity to make an unreal type character suddenly break into an unmistakably human utterance.

K. T.

YOU'RE IN THE RACKET, TOO. By James Curtis. Knopf. 1938. $2.50.

This second novel by James Curtis is particularly disappointing because it lacks most of those qualities which made his first so interesting. "There Ain't No Justice" treated intensively of the life and environment of a young British fighter; it had a strong and well-knit plot that carried local color and characterization along with it. But here that polarizing force is sadly lacking. "You're in the Racket, Too" is composed of a series of sketchy incidents calculated to acquaint us with London's second-story men,

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fences, and blackmailers, as well as some of those more respectable citizens whose vices lead them to find their common level with others. There are thus two sets of characters, and Mr. Curtis alternates from one to the other until he finally manages to have them interlock. The fictional design is logical, but there is nothing more cohesive in the story than design. None of the characters is sufficiently developed to hold the stage, and the social scene itself, which might have been the vital factor, is represented chiefly in a steady stream of salty, often incomprehensible underworld dialect. Mr. Curtis's crooks are incredibly vociferous, but they are not, for all their talk, really alive and significant for us, nor is the story, for all its multiplication of scene and incident.

N. L. R.

Miscellaneous

MUTINY AT SEA. By Robert L. Hadfield. Dutton. 1938. $3.

In the beginning Mr. Hadfield pauses to pronounce a few thoughts, both abstract and particular, concerning the cause of mutinies. He proclaims revolution afloat has its roots in another of those vicious circles upon which so many, many things are blamed. He beholds ships, crimps, and captains aligned in an association for mutual profit, which seems to be created at the expense of the crews. This view is historical, but out of fashion. Today, a ship is an investment; a captain takes a crew sent him by the union, regardless of its merit, so its dues be paid; and the crimp is on relief. Under the new regime as under the old we still have mutinies; it would be a little rash to predict just how many will occur next week.

As a prime cause of violent uprisings Mr. Hadfield advances the poor quality of the food provided. He holds the stomach is master of the human emotions. When the stomach revolts from evil sustenance, its rage converts the sailor into a dangerous revolutionary out to justify his outraged digestion. In a mistreated stomach rests the spirit of first class homicide; captains and stewards being among the preferred victims. Facts do not entirely support Mr. Hadfield here. Stewards, responsible for the food before the cook does what he can to it, are often quite neutral in a mutiny, and not infrequently are taken to the hearts of the mutineers by unanimous agreement.

Indeed, the author puts it on a bit thick when he probes for the cause of mutiny, and he has not made his position any easier by pointing out that British seamen have seldom disgraced themselves by being ring-leaders in mutiny. The brotherhood of the sea is likely to be both quick and jealous in retort to that one.

The thirteen stories of revolt at sea are all genuine. Five of them are not exactly strange and new, but the remaining eight have not been before presented with the element of mutiny uppermost in the telling. They are freely told, without any attempt at chronological arrangement, but with a fundamental faithfulness to the facts. Clearly, the purpose of Mr. Hadfield was to provide interesting reading about one of the more vicious chapters of the seagoing mind, and this purpose he has achieved with conviction.

I. A.

Trade Winds

BY P. E. G. QUERCUS

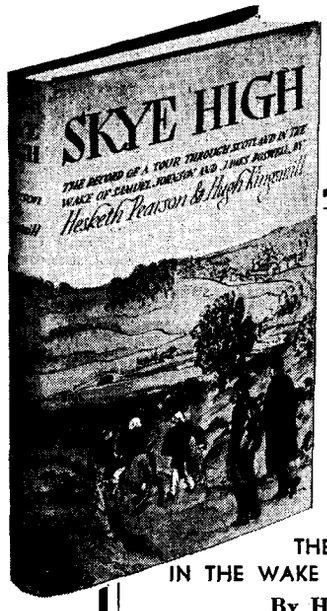
WE thought Ted McCawley's bookshop (Haverford, Pa.) smelt very sweet when we were in there not long ago: we learned that he has brightened up the book traffic by taking on fresh cut flowers as a side-line. *Books and Flowers for Pleasant Week-Ends* is his vernal slogan. ☞Greatly tickled by a tribute (in G. C. Merriam Company's *Word Study)* to President Neilson of Smith College. Margaret Farrand Thorp is writing:—

"You will find among a good many generations of Smith alumnae the firm conviction that Chaucer looked like President Neilson; that he had merry eyes, a little white beard, a rich laugh; that he moved with such swift unconscious dignity that one was scarcely aware of his short stature; and that—it is quite impossible to keep this out of the fourteenth-century picture — that Chaucer continually smoked very large, very good cigars."

☞The Library Company of Philadelphia is showing until March 10 a collection of First Editions of Charles Dickens, from the library at Dormy House, Pine Valley, N. J. ☞Allen French (Concord, Mass.) writes: "As to *Dernière Chemise,* and such, someone has lately put into print *London Derrière* as another translation. Do you get it? I did, though I am no musician." ☞Sure we do. One of our daughters used to play it on the harp.

☞Would (or wouldn't?) an omnibus of Clark Russell's best sea stuff be a good publishing venture? ☞When we deplore not being able to take a midwinter vacation to the Caribbean we are consoled by studying the lilac-colored U.S. 3-cent stamp with its delicious little picture of the harbor of Charlotte Amalie, Virgin Islands — palm trees, bungalows, and schooners lying at anchor. What happens to the original sketches or drawings from which postage stamps are designed? How we'd love to have that one. Please, will the Postmaster General tell us about this? ☞The most surprising blurb we've seen in ages was in a critique *(N. Y. Times Book Review,* Feb. 13) of Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation,* (Gifford Lectures at Glasgow). The reviewer said, "Perhaps the most important book of its kind which the 20th century has yet produced." We wonder. The extracts quoted in support scarcely warrant it. ☞*Bibliographical Notes and Queries* has now reappeared after a year's vacation; the American editors (c/o Charles Scribner's Sons, 597 Fifth Avenue) earnestly solicit correspondence on bibliographic punctilio. Among the entries is a request for data on Norman Douglas's weird (and fortunately private) collection of Limericks. ☞Knopf is postponing titles originally scheduled for March 14 and 21 to March 28 and April 4, while the staff will concentrate on putting over Thomas Mann's *Joseph in Egypt* (reviewed on page 5). Dr. Mann is here for a lecture tour.

☞Hurrah for President Hutchins of Chicago who said lately that Schools of Journalism are mostly waffles (not his phrase); which we have been remarking for years and getting into endless trouble. ☞The best education for a journalist should be as general and classic and unspecific as possible; the pitiful little snippets of vulgar technique he can pick up any time as needed. ☞Another bunch of brickbats from the vocationalists, undoubtedly. ☞Rash old Q went again to the movies, to see a picture called *A Yank at Oxford;* it's more than a yank, it pulls Alma Mater's chair right out from under her. Except for the sound of the bells, exemplary tosh; and ill advised as a build-up for the unfortunate Robert Taylor. Well might he cry, as did the students at Leyden, *Hic sudari et frustra.*



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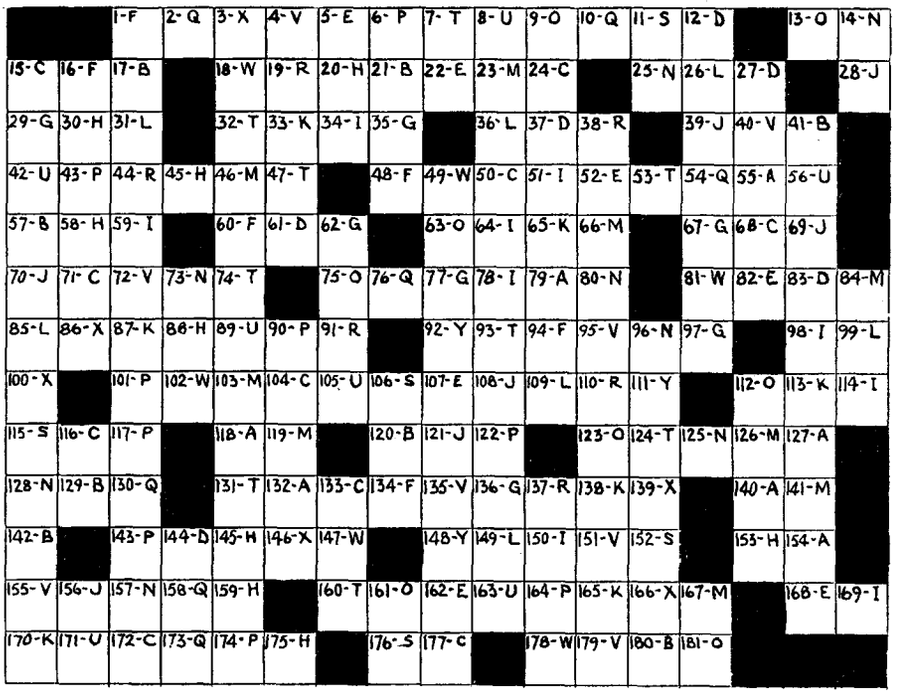
Double-Crostics: No. 205

By ELIZABETH S. KINGSLEY



DIRECTIONS

To solve this puzzle, you must guess twenty-five words, the definitions of which are given in the column headed DEFINITIONS. The letters in each word to be guessed are numbered. These numbers appear under the dashes in the column headed WORDS. There is a dash for each letter in the required word. The key letters in the squares are for convenience, indicating to which word in the definitions each letter in the diagram belongs. When you have guessed a word, fill it in on the dashes; then write each letter in the correspondingly numbered square on the puzzle diagram. When the squares are all filled in you will find (by reading from left to right) a quotation from a famous author. Reading up and down the letters mean nothing. The black squares indicate ends of words; therefore words do not necessarily end at the right side of the diagram.

When the column headed WORDS is filled in, the initial letters spell the name of the author and the title of the piece from which the quotation has been taken. Authority for spelling and definitions is Webster's New International Dictionary.

The solution of last week's *Double-Crostic* will be found on page 14 of this issue.

DEFINITIONS

A. Smallness; subtlety.

B. Warlike Negroes of West Africa.

C. Hilarious (slang) (comp.).

D. Cloudy, gloomy.

E. Choices.

F. Active powers.

G. Female spirit who warns of death (Gaelic).

H. Spends the summer.

I. Waxlike substance valued for perfumery.

J. Negative pole of an electrolytic cell.

K. Issue, upshot.

L. Siegfried's sword.

M. Without backbone or courage.

N. Repeated stroke of something long and loose (comp.).

O. Cut in, furrow.

P. Enchains, binds.

Q. Language of one of the Baltic groups.

R. Overcame.

S. Scribe of the gods (Egypt).

T. Talents.

U. Persistently annoying.

V. Universal.

W. Exalted fame.

X. Drama by Racine.

Y. Emblem of dawn.

WORDS

55 132 118 79 140 154 127

142 17 21 180 120 129 57 41

15 133 116 50 177 71 172 104 68 24

83 37 61 144 27 12

162 168 107 22 52 82 5

48 60 94 1 16 134

35 67 62 77 29 97 136

45 159 58 153 145 30 20 88 175

64 34 98 78 114 51 169 150 59

70 156 28 39 121 69 108

170 113 87 138 33 65 165

109 26 31 149 99 36 85

141 126 84 23 46 103 66 119 167

25 157 128 96 80 73 14 125

75 9 181 161 112 63 13 123

101 43 143 117 6 122 90 164 174

158 173 54 76 10 130 2

44 19 38 137 110 91

176 106 115 11 152

124 160 32 7 53 93 47 131 74

89 8 163 171 42 56 105

155 40 135 179 95 72 4 151

147 81 18 49 178 102

146 166 100 86 139 3

111 92 148

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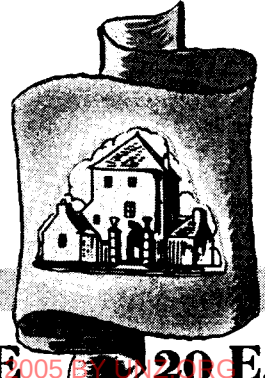

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